

there
for you

supporting UNISON members
when life gets tough



An information and advice guide

Food banks and fuel banks

This guide contains information about food banks – how they work and how UNISON branches can support members in need of emergency assistance both from There for You and by registering with your local food bank.

In recent years, UNISON's own charity, There for You, has received an increasing number of requests on behalf of members needing emergency help to buy food and pay for fuel. Whilst emergency help is available, branches and branch welfare officers should be aware of local support that is available when dealing with an emergency, and branches should have a system in place so that they can directly refer their member to a food bank if appropriate.



Good to know

Now UNISON branches can refer members to food banks.

Often food bank clients face decisions between eating and paying the rent. Some are so desperate they consider stealing food to feed their children and these aren't homeless people, they are often working families. Food banks meet mothers every day who skip their own meal to feed their children. Typically one third of food bank recipients are children.

About food banks

Why people need emergency food

1 in 5 people live in poverty in the UK as many families hit crisis. cannot afford to buy food and are going hungry in their own homes. Rising food and fuel costs, static incomes, high unemployment and changes to benefits are causing many families to struggle to put food on the table and the number of people needing foodbanks is growing significantly.

Government figures show **13 million people** live below the poverty line in the UK

In the year up to March 2018, the Trussell Trust's food bank network distributed **1,332,952 three-day emergency food supplies** to people in crisis, a 13% increase on the previous year. **484,026 of these went to children.** This is a higher increase than the previous financial year, where food bank use was up by 6%.

More than food

Foodbanks also offer a lot more than food. Volunteers provide a listening ear to clients over a warm drink, and signpost people to other charities and agencies who can help resolve the underlying cause of the crisis.

Who food banks help

Food bank clients are often low income families affected by a crisis such as reduced working hours, redundancy or even an unexpected bill. Others experience benefit delay, are victims of domestic violence, are hit by illness or have debt problems.

Over 40% of the referrals to Trussell Trust food banks are primarily due to **benefits issues**. 26% are as a result of benefit delays and around 17% are due to benefit changes.

How food banks work

Food banks are run by communities, not the state. Non-perishable food is donated by local people and sorted, packed and distributed by volunteers. Clients are referred to the food bank by a welfare professional such as a doctor or social worker, who will give them a voucher. As food banks are an emergency service many have a 'three food bank voucher guideline' policy – if someone needs more than three food bank vouchers in a period, the food bank will contact the person referring them to talk about what more can be done to prevent dependency.

In summary:

- Non-perishable food is donated by the public.
- Volunteers sort and pack food into emergency food boxes.
- People in crisis receive a food bank voucher from welfare professionals.
- Food bank vouchers are exchanged for three days worth of food.
- Food banks take time to listen and signpost clients to further support.

How can our branch refer a member?

Register

UNISON branches simply need to register with their local food bank. The Trussell Trust has over 420 food banks covering most of the UK. However, branches and branch welfare officers should check what is available in their own area and how they operate.

What then?

Most food banks operate a voucher system. These are available so that the branch/branch welfare officer can offer this emergency support to members who have little in the way of food.

This voucher can be posted to the member or their branch welfare officer/branch or be held at the food bank awaiting the member's arrival – in which case they should bring proof of identity.

What if the member needs more than one voucher?

If the member's situation is unlikely to be quickly resolved and consequently may need more than three vouchers, branches/branch welfare officers will need to discuss this with the food bank to validate the need for additional vouchers.

CHECKLIST

✓ Step 1:

FIND OUT which food banks are in your area – you can do this by checking on the Trussell Trust website: www.trusselltrust.org/get-help/find-a-foodbank. Also look on the local authority website to find out more information about other food banks operating in your area and the people they help.

✓ Step 2:

REGISTER with your food bank so that in an emergency you can make an immediate referral.

✓ Step 3:

SUPPORT your local food bank where possible by checking if your employer would be willing to set up a 'collection point' so that staff can make food donations if they wish.

Note: Trussell Trust is piloting an online voucher/referral scheme towards the end of 2018. This information guide will be updated as and when we have more information.

Remember

One-off EMERGENCY financial assistance is also available through UNISON There for You to help with food and emergency fuel. However, branches should also explore whether there are food banks that can help locally.

About Fuel Bank

Following a successful trial, Npower in partnership with The Trussell Trust and Durham Christian Partnership, pledged £2.25 million towards helping vulnerable families get back on their feet – with 14 Fuel Banks launching across the UK. This means anyone with a pre-payment meter who gets referred to a participating food bank could qualify for a voucher to provide enough credit for around 2 weeks of energy.

The scheme is already making a huge difference. Each week Fuel Bank™ helps around 800 people to keep their homes warm and eat well, including more than 300 children.

It's also why Fuel Bank™ support is available to everyone that needs it – regardless of whether Npower supply their energy or not.

How the NPower Fuel Bank works

The Npower Fuel Bank has been designed to utilise the existing food bank referral process developed by The Trussell Trust.

How else can UNISON help members in hardship?

For more information on ways that UNISON There for You can help your members, visit www.unison.org.uk/thereforyou or call: 020 7121 5620.

CHECKLIST

✓ Step 1:

Branch Welfare Officers should register as a referrer with their local Trussell Trust Food bank as indicated previously. If you are already a registered with your local Trussell Trust food bank then there's nothing more you need do. When you refer a member to the food bank with their voucher, if their household is on a prepayment meter (PPM) for electricity and/or gas and, if your local food bank is participating in the Fuel Bank scheme, they will receive a top-up voucher.

Note: Generally speaking no more than three vouchers will be issued in any 6-month period, and individuals may not receive more than one voucher within 10 days.

✓ Step 2:

A Fuel Bank voucher will then be given to the individual via text message or email. If the individual doesn't have a phone or email account the voucher will be emailed to the food bank within 24 business hours (vouchers are not issued on weekends or bank holidays). If required, the food bank will then contact the individual via an agreed means to share the voucher.

✓ Step 3:

The individual then takes this code to any shop with a Pay Point machine where it can be redeemed against electricity and/or gas using their pre-payment key or card at no cost to the customer. The Npower Fuel Bank's code can only be used for electricity and gas.

✓ Step 4:

Once the code has been redeemed, when the individual puts the relevant pre-payment key or card in their meter or meters, the money will appear as a credit.